



Session update from Olympia – Feb. 27, 2011

Major reform: K-12 education

Earlier this week on my [blog](#), I wrote about bipartisan cooperation. Specifically, I wrote about how the need to come together to solve the current budget shortfall is creating the momentum to achieve the kind of long-term reforms that will help ensure the funding of our public needs and obligations in a sustainable manner down the road.

Call this one example of finding opportunity in a crisis. But it isn't quite accurate to say that it took the crisis to turn legislators' attention to major reform in state government. The truth is, we've been making good progress on that account for years.

I understand that when the phrase 'major reform' is uttered, people have expectations of dramatic results. As perhaps they should. But it's possible that the demand for reform outstrips the patience required to see it through. Even the most dramatic results can take years to unfold, and they unfold so gradually that we become accustomed to them even in the midst of their taking hold.

Take K-12 education, for example – the paramount duty of the state. The past two legislative sessions have seen the broadest and most comprehensive reforms to our state's K-12 education system in Washington history.

This is a system of 2,000 schools, 60,000 teachers and 1 million students: even in the best of economic times, reform would not be felt immediately. But because these reforms were passed during the height of the Great Recession, a broader time horizon is appropriate.

The efforts we began in 2009 are intended to be fully implemented by 2018. But we pursued major education reform in the middle of a recession and during an era of significant budget cuts, click [here to read my full blog post](#) on this topic and the reasons why.

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3rd District Town Halls

Last week I announced two town halls that will include Representative Timm Ormsby, Representative Andy Billig and me. I hope you will be able to join us on Saturday, March 12, 2011 for one of them. The town halls will be at two 3rd District locations in Spokane (times and locations are below). Please RSVP to 3rdDistLegis@leg.wa.gov if you are able to attend.

10:00 a.m.

Northeast Community Center
4001 North Cook Street

2:00 p.m.

Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture
2316 W. 1st Avenue

This week in *Legislative Action*

Reducing school payrolls without penalizing teachers

Many of the state's highest paid school teachers would otherwise retire but instead keep teaching to avoid high health care costs triggered by retirement. This keeps the highest paid teachers on the payroll and consumes funds district could put to better use on other student needs. [SB 5846](#) is a common-sense reform bill that I prime sponsored that would remove the disincentive to retire by creating a "health care bridge to retirement," an optional subsidy of health premium benefits for members of plan 1 of the teachers' retirement system who are ineligible for Medicare and meet certain other requirements. As of July 2009, the latest report available, there were 5,204 applicable members still active as teachers. This is a way of thanking these teachers for their years of service in our classrooms, allowing school districts to save money on payroll, and providing younger teachers more opportunities to begin their teaching careers.

Funding Childcare Grants for Students in Higher Education

Childcare access has been determined to be one of the greatest impediments to degree completion. With that in mind, I worked with student leaders and introduced [SB 5795](#) a bill that would use unclaimed lottery winnings to restore funding for a childcare matching grant program for four-year public universities. This legislation is aimed at helping student parents gain access to higher education, and was a top priority for the Washington Student Association. SB 5795 was amended to include community and technical colleges and passed out of committee. The institutions leverage the funding with a minimum dollar for dollar match

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A RECAP OF CONSTITUENT MEETINGS THIS WEEK



Highlights of local constituent meetings I had this week include: Junior League, VOICES for Opportunity-Income-Childcare-Education and Support, local members from the Washington Federation of State Employees, and the Community Health Association of Spokane. I also had the opportunity to meet with several members of the Washington federal delegation, as both U.S. Senator Patty Murray and Congressman Adam Smith were in Olympia this past week.

I appreciate hearing from you, please continue to phone, mail or e-mail your thoughts on various issues, ideas or concerns you have as the legislative session moves forward.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lisa".

P.S. Remember to check out the Senate Democrats' [podcast](#) "In the Loop" for a summary of the week's events or visit us on twitter [@WASenDemocrats](#). A tip for twitter users, follow [#waleg](#) to see what other people are saying about the Washington State Legislature!

Click [here](#) for contact information for my Olympia or Spokane office.